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Activities of the Joint Inspection Unit of relevance to the United Nations Children's Fund

Note by the secretariat

Summary

This document provides information on reports prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit during the period September 2001 through September 2002 that are of specific relevance to UNICEF, which heretofore were not considered by the Executive Board. It presents action taken by UNICEF as well as the views of the Executive Director on the issues raised by the inspectors.

* E/ICEF/2003/2.

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I. Overview

1. Reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) are submitted to the executive heads of the organizations concerned, who then act upon them, as appropriate, and report to their relevant Executive Boards. The present document provides information on JIU reports issued from September 2001 through September 2002 that are considered relevant to the administration and management of UNICEF, together with comments regarding the conclusions and recommendations contained therein, and a summary of actions undertaken.

2. Since the previous report (E/ICEF/2002/5) was reviewed by the Executive Board at its first regular session of 2002, UNICEF has continued its ongoing dialogue with JIU on handling of the reports and on procedures for subsequent follow-up. This greater intensity of dialogue and interaction on issues of common interest have increased the relevance of the reports, improved implementation of their recommendations and enhanced transparency. There is active coordination among members of the Executive Committee of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and with the members of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) for Coordination to ensure consistency and coherence in the handling of JIU reports so as to obtain maximum benefits.

II. Reports submitted by the Joint Inspection Unit of direct interest to UNICEF

3. In the last year, JIU has issued several reports of interest to UNICEF. The comments, observations and follow-up notes of UNICEF are summarized below.

A. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on "Enhancing governance oversight role: structure, working methods and practices on handling oversight reports" (JIU/REP/2001/4), and the comments of the Secretary-General on this report (A/57/58/Add.1)

4. This report addresses the "executive" legislative organs of the United Nations system, providing a series of recommendations and conclusions aimed at enhancing their effectiveness and quality of oversight. The findings are presented as general guidelines for organizations to tailor to their own specific circumstances.

5. Many of the recommendations for enhancing effectiveness of oversight by legislative organs are already established practice for the UNICEF Executive Board. In this regard, it should be noted that reports of both the UNICEF Office of Internal Audit and United Nations Board of Auditors are already regular items on the Board's agenda. Significant improvement has been registered in the presentation and analysis of issues with reports taken up under appropriate substantive agenda items. The secretariat has also expanded reporting on management actions to address audit recommendations. Generally, policy and management actions are presented within an overall context and without specific attribution to particular oversight reports. While the format and presentation of support budgets for UNICEF is harmonized with those of the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations

Population Fund and approved by their Executive Board, the impact of relevant JIU recommendations and related follow-up action will be included as appropriate.

6. With respect to its meetings, the Executive Board defines its own agenda and working methods. The Board currently is organizing a series of informal meetings on ways to improve further its overall working methods, with the most recent discussions held in June and September 2002. This exercise has been initiated by the Executive Board and is directed towards ensuring that the efficient organization of its work is an ongoing exercise.

7. In decision 2001/4 (E/ICEF/2001/16), the Executive Board requested the Executive Director to submit brief summaries of JIU reports and, where appropriate, recommendations for action by the Board, and requested the Executive Director to inform the Board of measures taken on the implementation of those recommendations. Under those procedures, upon receipt for comment of a draft JIU report, the Executive Director includes in her responsive comments an indication of whether the report is, in her opinion, relevant to UNICEF or not. Where reports are determined to have relevance, they are submitted as final reports to the Executive Director for circulation to the members of the Executive Board. Where relevant, these reports, along with the comments of the Executive Director, are available for discussion under the appropriate substantive agenda item. The subsequent implementation and follow-up of the findings and recommendations of JIU will take into account the comments and decisions of the Executive Board. The Executive Director submits an annual report to the Executive Board outlining measures taken on the implementation of approved recommendations of JIU, including those falling within the purview of the Executive Director.

B. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on "Involvement of civil society organizations other than non-governmental organizations and the private sector in technical cooperation activities: experiences and prospects of the United Nations system" (JIU/REP/2002/1)

8. This report examines the profile of civil society organizations (CSOs) and offers guidance as to how United Nations entities can better structure and expand their involvement and cooperation with them in economic and social development programmes. The report foresees an active partnership role for CSOs in technical assistance, and an active support of them by United Nations organizations.

9. UNICEF traditionally has worked closely with CSOs and has a broad range of relationships with them. In many aspects of this relationship, UNICEF is a leader among United nations agencies. It widely supports the involvement of CSOs in programmes and projects for which it provides assistance under agreed country programmes of cooperation. CSOs have an active role in the governance structure of UNICEF and are partners in advocacy initiatives. CSOs played a major role in the preparations for the General Assembly Special Session on Children and participated actively in the session and associated events.

10. UNICEF supports a process for further exploring policy and operational issues relevant to cooperation with CSOs, particularly at the country level. UNICEF already includes CSOs in its information-sharing, communication and networking

on technical cooperation programmes. Where appropriate at the national level, UNICEF would envisage extending training and capacity-building opportunities to CSO staff. There is also participation by CSOs in the context of UNICEF-supported emergency response activities. UNICEF offices promote the appropriate involvement of CSOs in national and local planning and policy development on issues relating to children's rights and well-being.

11. UNICEF currently is reviewing mechanisms to enhance the role of CSOs, including the consultative dimension, taking into consideration many aspects of the JIU report. Further follow-up also will take into account the work of the High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP), on whose current agenda the issue of United Nations system collaboration with CSOs is an item. The HLCP has agreed to commission a study to take stock of the state of collaboration between United Nations organizations and CSOs highlighting the policy dimension of such cooperation.

C. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on "The results approach in the United Nations: implementing the Millennium Declaration" (JIU/REP/2002/2)

12. This report sets out a results-based approach to the implementation of United Nations programme activities as well as a restructuring and streamlining of country-level processes and global reporting. In particular, the proposals envision an ambitious streamlining of many of the current processes into a single Common Country Review Report, a strategic review debate every five years in each country and a global debate every five years synthesizing the country reports and informed by a new report, the Medium-Term Strategic Review.

13. UNICEF is following up on the report in the context of reform work being carried out in the UNDG and the CEB machinery as well as in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. A number of the key proposals relate to processes and issues that are within the purview of Member States and are therefore more suited to discussion and decision-making by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

D. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on "Support costs related to extrabudgetary activities in organizations of the United Nations system" (JIU/REP/2002/3)

14. This report presents a review of the formulation and application of policies on extrabudgetary support costs in a range of United Nations agencies and proposes measures aimed at them. It recognizes the reality of frozen or falling core resources and the relative increasing importance of extrabudgetary funding. This report came at a particularly opportune time for UNICEF, coinciding with the preparation of the report on the UNICEF recovery policy (E/ICEF/2003/AB/L.1) to be submitted to the first regular session of the Executive Board in 2003.

15. The JIU report provides an analysis of approaches of various United Nations organizations, a range of such key definitions as fixed costs and variable costs, and an analysis of fully or incremental cost-recovery principles based on the experiences

of organizations using these respective approaches. The report also contains a recommended methodology that combines the best practices among the organizations surveyed. Finally, there is recognition of the different nature of United Nations organizations and different cost structures, which leads to the principle of transparency in presenting the recovery policy rather than uniform policy for all.

16. Much of the analysis and recommendations presented in the report reflect the practice existing in present UNICEF procedures. For example, the Executive Board approves country programmes of cooperation funded from regular and other resources. Coupled with the resource mobilization strategy approved by the Executive Board, this ensures that resources will be focused on the priority areas of the medium-term strategic plan. This principle, cited in the report as the fundamental purpose for pursing extrabudgetary activities, has been followed by UNICEF since the inception of other resources (extrabudgetary) activities.

17. The UNICEF methodology to calculate the incremental support costs for extrabudgetary resources is also presented in the report as an option to be followed by other organizations.

18. In the report on cost recovery (E/ICEF/2003/AB/L.1), UNICEF has followed the JIU recommendation in respect of the incremental cost measurement method to define the share of the costs associated with extrabudgetary activities, having used actual income and expenditure in the past as the basis for calculation.

19. Finally, UNICEF has conformed to the JIU recommendation which proposes a sliding scale support-cost rate for different volume of other resources as well as special recovery rate for thematic funding for MTSP priorities.

E. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on "Extension of water-related technical cooperation projects to end-beneficiaries: bridging the gap between the normative and the operational in the United Nations system (Case studies in two African countries)" (JIU/REP/2002/4)

20. The recommendations in the report relate to a review of activities of United Nations agencies in the area of water resources. One of the two case studies included in the report highlights a water, sanitation and health project in Zambia where UNICEF has been supporting the Government in reducing child morbidity and mortality rates and improving the quality of life. The project aimed to increase the availability of safe and sustainable water supplies and sanitation facilities in rural and peri-urban areas in coordination with health and hygiene interventions. The report of the case study concludes that since 1997, 90 per cent of the water supply systems installed through UNICEF assistance were still functioning, 22,000 households had built family latrines and hygiene practices had improved.

21. UNICEF support to Governments is focused on the development of community-based, integrated water supply, sanitation and hygiene projects. The report highlighted the fact that after a number of years, some of the water supply systems were no longer functioning. After completion of projects, UNICEF provides support for repair of systems when requested in terms of spare parts and equipment, although the Government and community are responsible for maintaining the systems. UNICEF recognizes there is need for further development of more

effective operation and maintenance mechanisms in many developing countries, especially in Africa, where an estimated 30 per cent of systems are no longer functioning.

22. UNICEF supports the findings that improving information exchange may be necessary while recognizing the distinct differences of each of the programmes supported by United Nations agencies. It is complying with the recommendation to develop a database of water-related technical cooperation projects executed with the support of United Nations agencies.

23. UNICEF confirms the importance of efforts to enhance and complement the current United Nations Development Assistance Framework exercise. Taking this exercise a step further and developing an operational process where programmes of United Nations agencies would be coordinated towards integrated water sector interventions (as outlined in recommendation six of the report) may be difficult in terms of the mandated responsibilities of each agency. UNICEF supports the need for closer coordination at field level and sharing of information between the organizations presently working within the sector. As in other sectors, an inter-agency water group has been established in many countries through the resident coordinator system. Good examples of these groups can be documented and shared with all resident coordinators for the establishment of similar mechanisms on a global scale. Certainly, this can be an effective means to coordinate and harmonize the support of all United Nations agencies and donors supporting sectoral activities.

24. The report calls for more actions to be taken to bridge the gap between activities conducted at the normative level and operational activities at field level. The report stresses the need for better synergies and complementarities in field-level interventions. UNICEF continues to support the Subcommittee on Water Resources, formerly part of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and which is presently reorganizing its structure as part of the reform of the CEB. The subcommittee is mandated to enhance country-level coordination of activities by the members of the United Nations system concerning the application of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources.

F. Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on "Reform of the administration of justice in the United Nations system: options for higher recourse instances" (JIU/REP/2002/5)

25. This report addresses the reform of the administration of justice in the United Nations system. It considers the possibility of establishing a higher instance in respect of the binding decisions of the two main international administrative jurisdictions, namely, the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal and the United Nations Administrative Tribunal. While reform of the administration of justice falls primarily within the purview of the Secretary-General, the follow-up to these matters should take place within the machinery established for administration of the common system and within the CEB process.

26. UNICEF notes that the Secretary-General has established an Office of the Ombudsman as called for by the General Assembly and as recommended by the JIU. As noted in the report, UNICEF has an ombudsperson system to help staff address grievances in an informal and conciliatory manner. UNICEF recently has revised its

ombudsperson policy in consultation with the UNICEF Global Staff Association. The revised policy clearly defines the terms of reference of an ombudsperson as a neutral third party whose primary role is to serve as a mediator. The ombudsperson provides informal, impartial and confidential consultation to staff members in disputes related to conditions of employment. In the past year, UNICEF has developed a training programme for new ombudspersons and implemented a major training initiative for ombudspersons and human resources officers throughout the organization. UNICEF intends to experiment further with ways to strengthen the system and give recognition and authority to ombudspersons in order to resolve grievances early and informally by establishing panels of ombudspersons and by better rewarding and recognizing successful ombudspersons.

27. UNICEF shares the views of the JIU on the publication in annual reports of summarized information on the number and nature of the cases heard before joint disciplinary committees (JDCs) insofar as its applies to ad hoc JDCs at UNICEF.

III. Ongoing/forthcoming reports of the Joint Inspection Unit of interest to UNICEF

28. Two ongoing JIU reports are of interest to UNICEF, on the implementation of multilingualism in the United Nations system and on United Nations system revenue-producing activities.

29. In addition, UNICEF has taken note of the preliminary listing of potential reports for 2002 and beyond, with the following expected to have relevance for UNICEF:

(a) Effective arrangements and mechanisms to ensure interdisciplinary approaches to the formulation and implementation of programmes and activities;

(b) Role of the United Nations system in disaster reduction and response;

(c) Cooperation of the United Nations system with multilateral financial institutions;

(d) Harmonization of administrative practices and entitlements for staff of the United Nations system serving at field duty stations;

(e) Human resources management in the United Nations system (a series of reports);

(f) Voluntary contributions from Member States;

(g) Planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation in the United Nations system: status of implementation of results-based management;

(h) Procurement practices in the United Nations.